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ABSTRACT

This news release reports that college-bound high school students in 2000 have maintained the American College Testing Program (ACT) score level reached in the last years of the 1990s. Data show the composite ACT score to be 21 (on the scale of 1-36) for the fourth consecutive year. A record number of 1,065,138 members of the high school class of 2000 took the ACT college entrance and course placement examinations. Research has shown that participation in college preparatory courses is directly related to higher levels of achievement on the ACT tests. Large differences in achievement between those who take more rigorous courses and those who take fewer are evident among all racial, ethnic, and gender groups and at all socioeconomic levels. One-fourth of the ACT tested students who hoped to enroll at a "highly selective" college had ACT scores at or below the national average, a finding that points to the need for additional college counseling. Some gender and racial differences in ACT scores are noted. (SLD)

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News from ACT

ACT
INFORMATION FOR LIFE'S TRANSITIONS

ED 445 111

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NOTE TO EDITORS/REPORTERS: This news release and accompanying documents report information about the nation's 2000 high school graduates who took the ACT Assessment. States, districts and schools receive similar information about their students. However, ACT releases only national and selected state data; ACT **does not release local district or school data**. You must contact district and school offices for local information.

ACT SCORES FOR 2000 MAINTAIN GAINS OF THE '90s

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- **Record Number of ACT-Tested High School Graduates**
- **Increase in College Readiness**
- **Need for More College Counseling**
- **Interest in Computer Careers and Teaching Continues to Lag**

IOWA CITY, IOWA, August 17—College-bound high school students this year have maintained the ACT score level reached in the last years of the 1990s, the first decade ever in which the national average increased substantially. Data show the composite ACT score at 21 (on the scale of 1-36) for the fourth consecutive year.

A record number of 1,065,138 members of the high school class of 2000 took the ACT college entrance and course placement exam.

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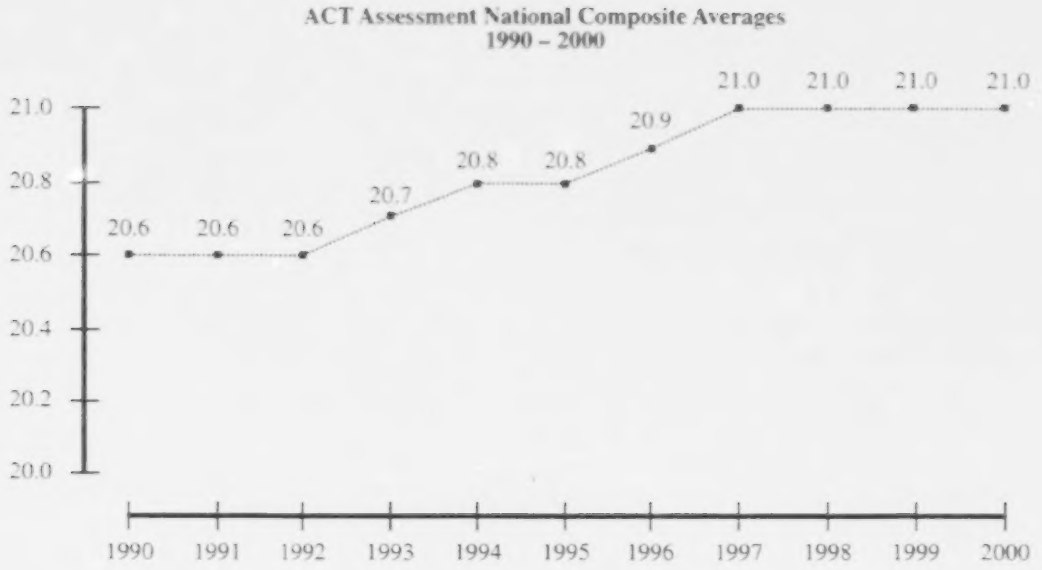


According to an announcement today from Richard L. Ferguson, president of ACT Inc., steadily increasing or stable ACT scores have been the status quo only since 1990.

"From the 1960s through the '80s, the national average score fluctuated constantly," Ferguson said. "Decreases outnumbered increases, and increases were seldom consecutive. Today, the situation is the reverse. We haven't seen a decline in the national average since 1989."

Ferguson also noted the record number of ACT-tested students: "We had 46,000 more in this year's graduating class than in the last, and the total increase since 1990 has been almost 250,000. The phenomenon of thousands more students preparing for college each year while achieving average entrance-exam scores consistently equal to or higher than those of the year before is very positive."

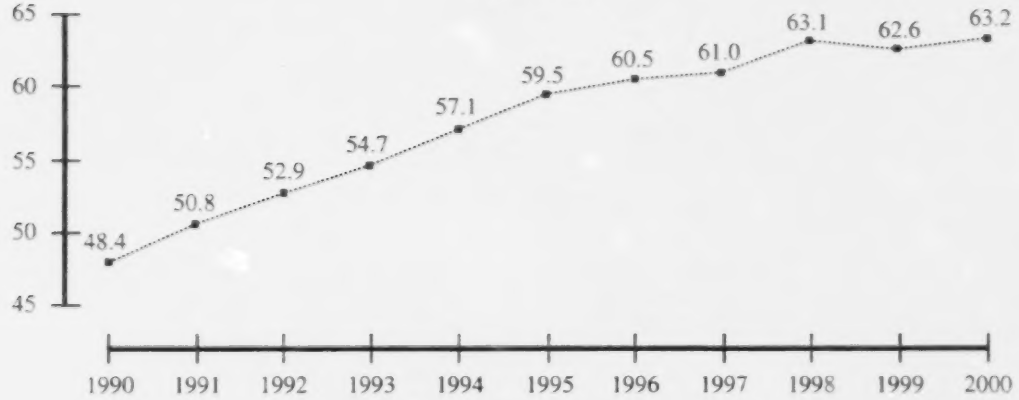
(more)

- **Increase in College Readiness**

Research has shown repeatedly that participation in college-preparatory courses is directly related to higher levels of achievement on the ACT tests and, thus, to greater likelihood of success in college. Large differences in achievement between those who take more rigorous courses and those who take fewer are evident among all racial, ethnic and gender groups and at all socioeconomic levels.

"Since 1990, we've seen a significant increase in the percentage of students taking upper-level classes in preparation for college," Ferguson said. "This increase is a key reason for the positive score trend over this period. Ten years ago, fewer than half the graduates reported taking what we call a 'core curriculum.' This year's graduates set a new high in core-course participation, with slightly more than 63 percent reporting that they took a full complement of courses."

Percentages of ACT-Tested Graduates Reporting Core Curriculum*
1990 – 2000



* At least four years of English and three years each of math (algebra and above), social sciences and natural sciences.

The differences in achievement between those who take more rigorous courses and those who take fewer are especially clear, according to ACT officials, in the areas of mathematics and science.

"Students with more math and science courses achieve much higher average scores," Ferguson said, "not only on the ACT subject tests, but also on the composite, or overall, score. Those higher scores, in turn, typically translate into scholarship opportunities, more postsecondary options and better academic performance during the critical first year of college."

Average ACT Scores by Years of Math and Science, 2000 Graduates

Years of High School Mathematics	No. & Pct. of Students	ACT Math Average	ACT Composite Average
Four or more	636,936 (62.6)	22.6	22.6
Three or three and a half	270,754 (26.6)	18.2	19.1
Two or less	110,162 (10.8)	16.7	17.4

Years of High School Science	No. & Pct. of Students	ACT Sci. Reasoning Average	ACT Composite Average
Three or four	798,207 (78.4)	21.6	21.7
Two or less	219,601 (21.6)	19.1	18.7

"While the data show that many college-bound students are taking three or four years of math and science in high school, a significant number still are not," Ferguson said. "These students must be encouraged to follow the lead of the ones who are better-prepared."

- **Need for More College Counseling**

In addition to taking more rigorous courses, students also need to know more about the levels of academic achievement colleges expect of their entering freshmen, Ferguson said: "Many students hope to enroll at a college or university that expects a higher level of performance than those students have demonstrated. They should be better informed about these matters early in high school rather than having to find out about them after they've applied to college."

As an example, Ferguson pointed to the ACT-tested graduates of 2000 hoping to enroll at a "highly selective" college. The majority of freshmen accepted at these colleges are from the top 10 percent of their high school class. Yet, according to Ferguson, "one-fourth of the ACT-tested students whose first choice for a college is highly selective have ACT scores at or below the national average."

Level of Selectivity of College	Percent of High School Graduates Hoping to Enroll at Each Level With ACT Score At or Below National Average
Highly selective (majority of freshmen in top 10%)	24
Selective (majority of freshmen in top 25%)	47
Traditional (majority of freshmen in top 50%)	61

- **Interest in Computer Careers and Teaching Continues to Lag**

ACT officials also noted the need for career counseling that includes the latest information about the labor market and the national job outlook so students can make informed career choices well before they commit to a postsecondary program of study.

"Two years ago, ACT pointed out that only 4 percent of college-bound high school graduates indicated an interest in a career in computer science or computer engineering," Ferguson said. "That report elicited a great deal of media attention and discussion because the low figure contrasted sharply with other reports that the fastest-growing occupations were all computer-related."

In 1999 the percentage of ACT-tested graduates looking ahead to a computer career increased slightly, to about 4.5 percent, and this year it is up again, to just over 5 percent.

"These small increases suggest that more students are realizing that the computer field offers significant opportunity," Ferguson said, "but the situation remains little changed. The Information Technology Association of America recently reported 1.6 million new technology jobs this year. But the association also concluded that half these jobs likely will not be filled. The reason? Too few qualified applicants."

Top 10 Vocational Choices of ACT-Tested 2000 High School Graduates

Vocational Choice	Percent Males	Percent Females	Percent Total
Health Sciences	10	26	20
Business & Management	12	9	10
Education	6	14	10
Undecided	11	8	10
Social Sciences	5	10	8
Engineering	11	2	6
Visual & Performing Arts	6	7	6
Communication & Communication Tech	4	5	5
Computer Science/Engineering	8	2	5
Biological & Physical Science	4	4	4

Interest in a teaching career also continues to fall short of the expected demand, Ferguson said: "Last year, the Department of Education estimated that at least two million new teachers will be needed over the next decade, and policymakers have been calling for programs to increase teachers' skills and qualifications. But only 10 percent of college-bound high school graduates want to pursue a career in education, as has been the case for more than 20 years."

The problem is even more acute for minorities. The number of elementary and secondary students belonging to minority groups increases every year, yet few minority graduates seem interested in careers in education.

"This year, the only groups whose in interest in education increased--and the increases were slight--were Asian students, up from 4 percent to 5, and whites, up to 12 percent from 11," Ferguson said. "The percentages for all other groups are just what they were a year ago."

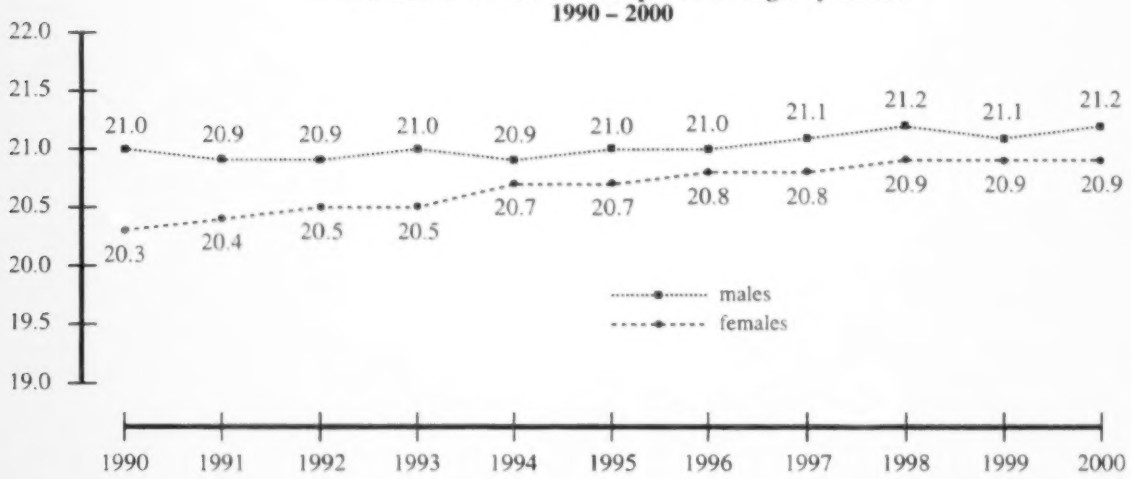
Percentages of ACT-Tested 2000 High School Graduates Choosing Education as Their 1st Career Field, by Racial/Ethnic Group

American Indian	9
Asian	5
Black	6
Hispanic	8
Multiracial	7
White	12
Other	7

Additional data of interest from the 2000 ACT report:

- The ACT composite average for females remained at 20.9 this year. Female graduates maintained their scores in English, math and science reasoning but decreased 0.1 point in reading. Males, after slipping to 21.1 a year ago, raised their composite average back to 21.2. They increased their average score in reading from 21.1 to 21.2, and in science reasoning from 21.5 to 21.6. More females than males continue to take the ACT (the increase since 1990 in female graduates tested is 160,860, nearly double the 82,507 increase in males). Fifty-seven percent of the tested population is now female. During this period, females have raised their average composite score by 0.6 point, while males have increased theirs by 0.2. In 1994 the "gender gap" narrowed considerably from previous years. Since then it has varied from 0.2 to 0.3 point, a much smaller difference than at any earlier time.

ACT Assessment National Composite Averages by Gender
1990 – 2000



- Within each racial or ethnic group, females outperform males on two of the ACT tests, English and reading. On the other two tests, math and science reasoning, males generally outperform females. The one exception is black students: this year, both males and females achieved the same average score in science reasoning.

2000 Male & Female ACT Test Scores by Ethnic/Racial Category

	English		Math		Reading		Science R		Comp.	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Am Indian	17.6	18.4	19.1	18.1	19.3	19.5	19.9	19.1	19.1	18.9
Asian	20.1	20.8	23.9	22.7	21.1	21.4	22.1	21.1	21.9	21.6
Black	15.6	16.9	16.9	16.8	16.4	17.4	17.3	17.3	16.7	17.2
Hispanic	17.6	18.1	19.6	18.4	19.0	19.1	19.6	18.8	19.1	18.8
Multiracial	20.2	21.0	21.3	20.0	21.7	22.1	21.7	20.6	21.3	21.1
White	20.7	21.7	22.0	20.8	22.0	22.4	22.3	21.3	21.9	21.7
Other	18.1	18.7	21.1	19.7	19.0	19.3	20.2	19.3	19.7	19.4

- Minority students improved most in 2000 on the ACT science reasoning test. Asians raised their average science reasoning score by 0.2 point, and American Indians, multiracial and other minorities lifted their averages by 0.1. Blacks and Hispanics maintained the scores from last year. Overall, minority performance on the four subject tests was slightly higher this year. Among the 24 scores for the six groups, nine were up over 1999 (one by 0.2 point and 8 by 0.1), 11 remained the same, and five were down 0.1 point.

Average composite scores for minority students were mostly stable, as they have been in recent years. The score for American Indians increased 0.1 point, while that for blacks decreased 0.1 point. The composite averages for the other four groups remained the same.

2000 ACT Subject & Composite Scores* by Ethnic/Racial Minority

	No. Tested	English	Math	Reading	Sci. Reason	Composite
Am Indian	10,976	(18.0)	18.5	**19.4**	**19.4**	**19.0**
Asian	35,474	20.5	**23.2**	**21.3**	**21.5**	21.7
Black	110,617	16.4	(16.8)	(17.0)	17.3	(17.0)
Hispanic	57,815	17.9	(18.9)	19.1	19.1	18.9
Multiracial	14,441	20.7	20.5	21.9	**21.1**	21.2
Other	16,116	**18.5**	20.3	**19.2**	**19.7**	19.5

* Scores higher than in 1999 indicated by bold type, lower scores by ( ).

- ACT-tested graduates reporting themselves as home-schooled numbered 4,593 in 2000, a 41-percent increase. Home-schooled students achieved a composite average of 22.8, 0.1 point higher than in 1999.

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